

OT everybody says," said the

frightened Seth. gaining a cowardly confidence under his adversary's emotion. "Wot every cub that sets yer, under his cantin' teachin'

and sees 'em together, knows. It's wot you'ld hev knowed of he and Roop Filgee hadn't played ye fer a softy all the time. And while you've bin hangin' round yer for a flicker of Cressy's gownd as she prances out o' school, he's bin lying low and laffin' at ye, and white he's turned Roop over to keep you here, pretendin' to give ye lessons, he's been gallivantin' round with her and huggin' and kissin' her in barns and in the brush-and now you want to quar'll with me."

He stopped, panting for breath, and stared malignantly in the grey face of his hearer. But Uncle Ben only lifted his heavy hand mildly with an awkward gesture of warning, stepped softly in his old cautious hesitating manner to the open door, closed it, and returned gently. "I rekon ye got in through the winder, didn't ye Seth?" he said, with a laboured affectation of unemotional case, "a kind o' one leg over, and one, two, and then you'er in, eh?"

"Never you mind how I got in, Ben Dabney, " returned Seth, his hostility and insolence increasing with his opponent's evident weakness, ''ez long got yer and got-by G-d! what I kem here for! For whiles all this was goin' on and whiles the fool man and old fool woman was swallowin' what they did see and blinkin' at what they didn't, and huggin' themselves that they'd got high-toned kempany fer their darter, that high-toned kempany was playin' them too, by G-d! Yes, sir! that high-toned, cantin' school teacher was keepin' a married woman in Frisco, all the while he was here honeyfoglin' with Cressy, and I've got the pa-pers yer to prove it." He tapped his breast pocket with a coarse laugh and thrust his face forward into the grey

shadow of his adversary's.
'An' you sorter spotted their bein' in this yer desk and fursted it?" said Uncle Ben, gravely examining the broken lock in the darkness as it were the most important feature of the incident.

eth nodded. "You bet your life I saw blue through the winder only this afternest lookin' over 'em alone, and I reckened to lay my hands on 'em if I had to bust him or his desk. And I did! he added with a triumphant chuckle.

'And you did-sure pop!'' said | Uncle passing his heavy hand along the splinenvilin' betweet him and this ver- this

with inhored formality.
"Treckon of the old fool McKinstry don't shoot him in his tracks thar'll be white men enough in Injin Springs to ride this high-toned, pizenous hypocrit on a rail outer the settlement."

"That's so!" said Uncle Ben musingly, after a thoughtful pause, in which he still seemed to be more occupied with the broken desk than his companion's remark. Then he went on cautiously, "And ex this thing ought to be worked mighty fine, Seth, p'r'aps, on the hull, you'ld better let me have them papers. "What! You?" snarled Seth, drawing back with a glance of angry sus-picion; "not if I know it!"

"Seth," said Uncle Ben, resting his elbows on the desk confidentially, and speaking with painful and heavy deliberation, "when you first interdoesed this ver subject you elluded to my hevin', so to speak, rights o' pre-emption and interference with this young lady, and that in your opinion I wasn't partectin' them rights. It 'pears to me that, allowin' that to be gospel truth, them ther papers order be in my pos-session—you hevin', so to speak, no rights to purteet, bein' off the board with this yer young lady, and bein' moved gin 'rally by free and independent cussedness. And ez I sed afore, this sort fine, and them papers manniperlated with judgment, I reckon, Seth, if you don't objeck, I'll hev-hev-to trouble you.

Seth started to his feet with a rapid

glance at the door, but Uncle Ben had risen again with the same alarming expression of completely filling the darkened schoolroom and of shaking the floor beneath him at the slightest movement, Already he fancied he saw Uncle Ben's powerful arm hovering above him ready to descend. It suddenly occurred to him that if he left the execution of his scheme of exposure and vengeance to Uncle Ben, the onus stealing the letters would equally upon their possessor. advantage seemed more probable than the danger of Uncle Ben's weakly yielding them up to the master. In the latter case he, Seth, could still circulate the report of having seen the letters which Uncle Ben had himself stolen in a fit of jealousy-a hypothesis the more readily accepted from the latter's familiar knowledge of the schoolhouse and his presumed ambitious jealousy of Cressy in his present attitude as a man of position . With affected reflectance and hesitation he put his hand in his breast pocket.

Of course, ' he said, " if you're kalkilatin' to take up the quar'll on your rights, and ez Cressy ain tanythin' more to me, you order have the proofs. Only don't trust them interphat bound's hands. Once be get's them again he'll secure a warrant agin you, for stealin', That'll be his game. I'd show 'em to hee first-don't ye see?-and I reckon ef 's old Ma'nin McKinstry's darter, see Il make it lively for him.

He handed the letters to the looming figure before him. It seemed to become again a yielding mortal, and said in a Maitating voice, "P'r'aps you'd better make tracks outer this, Seth, and leave me yer to put things to rights and fix up that door and the desk agin to-morrow mornin'. He'd better not know it to vary his monotonous tone

onet and so start a row about it bein' broken into.''

The proposition seemed to please Seth; he even extended his hand in the dark-But he met only an irresponsive With a slight shrug of his shoulders and a grunting farewell, he felt his way to the door and disappeared. For a few moments it seemed as if Uncle Ben had also deserted the schoolhouse, so profound and quiet was the hush that fell upon it . But as the eye became accustomed to the shadow a greyish bulk appeared to grow out of it over the master's desk and shaped itself into the broad figure of Uncle Ben. Later, when the moon rose and looked in at the window it saw him as the master had seen him on the first day he had begun his lessons in the school house, with his face bent forward over the desk and the same look of child-like perplexity and struggle that he had worn at his allotted task. Unheroic, riduculous, and no doubt blundering and idiotic as then, but still vaguely persistent in his thought, he remained for some moments in this attitude. Then rising and taking advantage of the moonlight that flooded the desk he set himself to mend the broken lock with a large mechanical clasp-knife he produced from his pocket, and the aid of

his workmanlike thumb and finger. Presently he began to whistle softly, at first a little artificially and with relapses of reflective sil-The lock of the desk restored, he ence. secured into position again that part of the door lock which he had burst off in his entrance. This done, he closed the door gently and once more stepped out into the moonlit clearing. In replacing his knife in his pocket be took out the letters which he had not touched since they were handed to him in the darkness. His first glance at the handwriting caused him to stop. Then still staring at it, he began to move slowly and automatically backwards to the porch. When he reached it he sat down, unfolded the letter, and without attempting to read it, turned its pages over and over with the unfamiliarity of an illiterate man in search of the signature. This when found apparently plunged him again into motionless abstraction. Only once he changed his position to pull up the legs of his trousers, open his knees, and extend the distance between his feet, and then with the inifolded pages carefully tald in the moonlit space thus epened before him, regarded them with dubicus speculation. At the end of ten minutes he rose with a sigh of physical and mental relaxation, refolded the letter, put it in his pocket, and made his way to the town.

When he reached the hotel he turned into the barroom, and observ-Ben with slow deliberate admiration, ing that it happened to be comparntively deserted, asked for a glass of tered hd. "And you reckon, Seth, that | whisky. In response to the bar-keeper's this yer showin' of him up will break off glance of curiosity—as Uncle Ben seldom drank, and then only as a social function with others—he explained:

"I reckon straight whisky is about ex good ez the next thing for blind chills." The bar-keeper here interposed that in his larger medical experience he had found the exhibition of ginger in combination with gin attended with effect. although it was evident that in his business capacity he regarded Uncle Ben, as a drinker, with distrust.
"'Ye ain't seen Mr. Ford hanging 'round yer lately?" continued Uncle Ben

with laborious case.

The bar-keeper, with his eye still cornfully fixed on his customer, but his hands which were engaged in washing his glasses under the counter giving him the air of humorously communicating with a hidden confederate, had not seen the schoolmaster that afternoon.

Uncle Ben turned away and slowly mounted the staircase to the master's room. After a moment's pause on the landing, which must have been painfully obvious to any one who heard his heavy ascent, he gave two timid raps on the door which were equally ridiculous in contrast with his powerful tread. The door was opened promptly by the mas-"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said shortly.

"Come in.

Uncle Ben entered without noticing the omewhat ungracious form of invitation. "It war me," he said, "dropped in, not finding ye down stairs. Let's have a drink '

The master gazed at Uncle Ben, who, owing to his abstraction, had not yet wiped his mouth of the liquor he had imperfectly swallowed, and was in consequence more redolent of whisky than a confirmed toper. He rang the bell for the desired refreshment with a slightly cynical smile. He was satisfied that his visitor, like many others of humble position, was succumbing to his good fortune.

"I wanted to see ye, Mr. Ford," he began, taking an unproffered chair and depositing his hat after some hesitation outside the door, ''in regard to what I oncet told ye about my wife in Mizzouri. P'r'aps you disremember? "I remember," returned the master

resignedly. You know it was that arternoon that

fool Stacey sent the sheriff and the Harrisons over to McKinstry's barn." "Go on!" petulantly said the master,

who had his own reasons for not caring to recall it. "It was that arternoon, you know,

that you hadn't time to hark to meto go off on an engagement, ' continued Uncle Ben with protracted deliberation, "and---" "Yes, sir, I remember," interrupted

the master exasperatedly, "and really unless you get on faster, I'll have to leave you again." "It was that arternoon," said Uncle Ben without heeding him, "when I told

you I hadn't any idea what had become o' my wife ez I left in Mizzouri.' Yes, 'Said the master sharply, 'and I told you it was your bounden duty to

look for her." "That's so," said Uncle Ben nodding comfortably, "them's your very words: on'y a leetle more strong than that, ef 1 don't disremember. Well, I reckon I've got an idee! "

The master assumed a sudden expression of interest, but Uncle Ben did not

"I kem across that idea, so to speak, on the trail. I kem across it in some let-ters ez was lying wide open in the brush. I picked 'em up and I've got 'em here.

He slowly took the letters from his pocket with one hand, while he dragged the chair on which he was sitting beside the master. But with a quick flash of indignation Mr. Ford rose and extended his hand. "These are my letters, Dabney," he

said sternly, "stolen from my desk. Who has dared to do this?"?

But Uncle Ben had, as if accidentally, interposed his elbow between the master and Seth's spoils.

"Then it's all right?" he returned deliberately. "I brought 'em here beeause I thought they might give idee where my wife was. For them let-ters is in her own handwrite, You remember ez I told ez how she was a scollard . "

The master sat back in his chair white and dumb. Incredible, extraordinary and utterly unlooked for as was this revelation, he felt instinctively that it was

"I couldn't read it myself-ez you know. I didn't keer to ax any one else to read it for me-you kin reckon why, too. And that's why I'm troublin' you to-night, Mr. Ford-ez a friend.

The master, with a desperate effort, recovered his voice. "It is impossible. The lady who wrote those letters does not bear your name. More than that," he added with hasty irrelevance, "she is so free that she is about to be married. as you might have read. You have made a mistake, the handwriting may be like, but it cannot be really your wife's. 1

Uncle Ben shook his head slowly, "It's her'n-there's no mistake. When a man, Mr. Ford, hez, studied that handwritehevin', so to speak, knowed it on'y from the outside—from seein' it passin' like between friends—that man's chances o' bein' mistook ain't ez great as the man's who on'y takes in the sense of the words that might b'long to everybody. And her name not bein' the same as mine don't foller. Ef she got a divorce she'd take her old gal's name—the name of her famerly. And that would seem to allow she did get a divorce. What mowt she hey called herself when she writ

The master saw his opportunity and rose to it with a chivalrous indignation, that for the moment imposed even upon himself. "I decime to answer that question," he said angrily. "I refuse to allow the name of any woman who conours me with her confidence to be dragged into the infamous outrage that has been committed upon me and common decency. And I shall hold that theif and seoundrel—whoever he may be—answerable to myself in the absence of er natural protector."

Uncle Ben surveyed the hero of these glittering generalities with undisguised admiration. He extended his hand to him gravely.

Ef another proof was "Shnke! wantin', Mr. Ford, of that bein' my wife's letter," he said, "that high-toned style of yours would settle it. For ef thar was one thing she did like, it was that sort of po'try. And one reason why her and me didn't get on, and why I skedaddled, was because it wasn't in my line. Et's all in trainin'! On'y a man ez bad the fourth render at his fingers' ends could talk like that. Bein' brought up on Dobell-ez is nowhere-it sorter lets me out of you, ex it did outen her. But allowin' it ain't the square thing for you to mention her name, that wouldn't be nothin' agin my doin' it, and callin' her, well-Lou Price, in a keerless sort o way, chi "I decline to answer further," replied

the master quickly, although color had changed at the name. decline to say another word on the matter until this mystery is cleared up until I know who dared to break into my desk and steal my property, and the ed, and in the very egotism of awkward-

Uncle Ben without a word - put them in the master's hand, to his slight surprise, and it must be added to his faint discomfiture, nor was it decreased when Uncle-Ron added with grave naivete and a putronising pressure of his hand on his shoulder-". In course ez your takin' it on to vonrself, and ez Lou Price ain't got no further call on me, they orter be yours. Ez to who got 'em outer the desk, I reckon you ain't got no suspicion of any one spyin' round ve-hev ye?''

In an instant the recollection of Seth Davis's face at the window and the corroboration of Rupert's warning flashed across Ford's mind. The hypothesis that Seth had imagined that they were Cressy's letters, and had thrown them down without reading them when he had found out his mistake, seemed natural. For if he had read them he would undoubtedly have kept them to show to Cressy. The complex emotions that had disturbed the master on the discovery of Uncle Ben's relationship to the writer of the letters were resolving themselves into a furious rage at Seth. before he dared revenge himself he must be first assured that Seth was ignorant of their contents. He turned to

"I have a suspicion, but to make it certain I must ask you for the present to say nothing of this to anyone.

Uncle Ben nodded, "And when you hey found out and you're settled in your mind that you kin make my mind easy about this ver Lou Price, ez we'll call her, bein' divorced squarely, and bein' so to speak, in the way o' getting married agin, ye might let me know-ez a friend. 1 reckon I won't trouble you any more to-night-onless you and me another sociable drink together in the bar. No? Well, then, good-night. He moved slowly towards the door. With his hand on the lock he added: "Ef ver writen' to her agin, you might say ez how you found me lookin' well and comf'able, and hopen' she's enjyin' the same blessin'. 'So long.''

He disappeared, leaving the master in a hopeless collapse of conflicting, and it is to be feared, not very heroic emotions The situation which had begun so dra matically had become suddenly unromantically ludierous, without, however, losing any of its embarrassing quality. was conscious that he occupied the singular position of being more ridiculous than the husband-whose invincible and complacent simplicity stung him like the most exquisite irony. For an instant he was almost goaded into the fury of declaring that he had broken off from the writer of the letters forever, but its inconsistency with the chivalrous attitude he had just taken occurred to him in time to prevent him from becoming doubly absurd. His rage with Seth Davis seemed to him the only feeling that was genuine and rational, and yet now that Uncle Ben had gone even that had a spurious ring. It was necessary for him to lash himself into a fury over the hypothesis that the letters might have been Cressy's, and descorated by that seouns touch. Perhaps he had read them and left them to be picked up by others. He looked over them carefully to see it their meaning would to the ordinary reader appear obvious and compromising. His eye fell on the first paragraph. "I should not be quite fair with you,

Jack, if I affected to disbelieve in your faith, in your love for me and its endurance, but I should be still more unfair if I didn't tell you what I honestly believe, that at your age you are apt to deceive yourself, and, without knowing it, de-ceive others. You confess you have not yet decided upon your career, and you are always looking forward so hopefully, dear Jack, for a change in the future but you are willing to believe that far more serious things than that will suffer no change in the meantime. If we continued as we were, I, who am older than you, and have more experience, might learn the misery of seeing you change toward me as I have changed towards another, and for the same reason. If I were sure I could keep pace with you in your dreams and your ambition, if I were sure that I always knew what they were, we might still be happy -but I am not sure, and I dare not again risk my happiness on an uncertainty. In coming to my present resolution I do not look for happiness, but at least I know I shall not suffer disappointment, nor involve others in it. I confess I am growing too old not to feel the value to a woman-a necessity to her in this country-of security in her present and future position. Another can give me that. And although you may call this a selfish view of our relations, I believe that you will seen—if you do not, even as you read this now—feel the justice of it, and thank me for taking it.

With a smile of scorn he tore up the letter, in what he fondly believed was the bitterness of an outraged trustful nature, forgetting that for many weeks he had scarcely thought of its writer, and that he himself in his conduct had already anticipated its truths.

CHAPTER XIII.

The master awoke the next morning albeit after a restless night, with that clarity of conscience and perception which it is to be feared is more often the consequence of youth and a perfect circulation than of any moral conviction or integrity. He argued with himself that as the only party really aggreed in the incident of the previous night, the right of remedy remained with him solely, and under the benign influence of an early breakfast and the fresh morning air he was inclined to feel less sternly even towards Seth Davis. In any event, he must first carefully weigh the evidence against him, and examine the scene of the outrage closely. For this purpose he had started for the schoolhouse fully an hour before his usual time. He was even light hearted enough to recognise the humorou aspect of Uncte Ben's appeal to him, and his own ludicrously paradoxical attitude, and as he at last passed from the dreary flat into the fringe of upland pines, he was smiling. Well for him, perhaps, that he was no more effected by any premonition of the day before him than the lately awakened birds that lightip cut the still sleeping woods around him in their long flashing subre curves of flight. A yellow-thront, destined to be-come the brenkfast of a lazy hawk still swinging above the river, as especially moved to such a causeless and idiotic roulade of mirth that the master listening to the foolish bird was fain to whistle too. He presently stopped, however, with a slight embarrassment. For a few paces before him Cressy had unexpectedly appeared.

She had evidently been watching for him: but not with her usual indolent confidence. There was a strained look of the muscles of her mouth, as of some past repression, and a shaded hollow under her temples beneath the blonde rings of her shorter bair. Her habitually slow, steady eye was troubled, and she cast a furtive glance around her before she searched him with her glance. Without knowing why, yet vaguely fearing that he did he became still more embarrasspurpose of this unheard-of outrage. And | ness stammered without a further saluta-I demand possession of those letters at | tion; "A disgraceful thing has happened perpetrator. My desk was broken into,

"I know it, " she interrupted, with a half impatient, half uneasy putting away of the subject with her little handthere-don't go all over it again. Paw and Maw have been as me about it all night-ever since those Harrisons in their anxiousness to make up their quarrel, rushed over with the news. I'm tired of

For an instant he was staggered. How much had she learned! With the same awkward indirectness, he said vaguely: "But it might have been your letters, you know? 12

"But it wasn't," she said simply, "It ought to have been. I wish it had She stopped, and again regarded him with a strange expression. "Well," she said slowly, "What are you going to

erro find out the scoundrel who has done this, ' he said firmly, 'and punish him as he deserves. 17 The almost imperceptible shrug that

had raised her shoulders gave way as she regarded him with a look of weared compassion. ''No,'' she said gravely, ''you cau-

not. They're too many for you. You must go away, at once."?
"Never," he said, indigmantly.
"Even if it were not cowardice." If

would be more—a confession! \*\*

"Not more than they already know," she said wearily, "But, I tell you, you must go. I have specked out of the house and run here all the way to warn you. If you-you care for me, Jack-you will go." "I should be a traitor to you if I did,"

he said quickly. "I shall stay.
"But if-if-Jack-if-" s nearer him with a new found timidity, and then suddenly placed her two hands upon his shoulders: ''If-if-Jack-I were to go with you?''

The old rapt, eager look of possession had come back to her face now; her lips were softly parted. Yet even then she seemed to be waiting some reply more otent than that syllabled on the lips of the man before her.

Howbeit that was the only response 'Darling,' he said, kissing her, "but

wouldn't that justify them-' "Stop," she said suddenly. putting her hand over his mouth, she continued with the same half weary expression: "Don't let us go over all that ngain either. It is so tiresome. Listen, dear. You'll do one or two little things for me-won't you, dandy boy? Don't linger long at the schoolhous after lessons. Go right home! Don't look after these men to-day-to-morrow, Saturday, is your holiday, you know, and you'll have more time. Keep to yourself to-day as much as you can, dear, for twelve hours-until-until-you hear from me, you know. It will be all right, then, '' she added, lifting her eyelids with a sudden odd resemblance to her father's look of drowsy pain, which Ford had never noticed before, "Promise me that, dear, won's you?"

With a mental reservation he promised hurriedly-pre-occupied in his wonder why she seemed to avoid his explanation, in his desire to know what had happened, in the pride that kept him from asking more or volunteering a defense, and in his ctill haunting sense of having been and even attracted the attention of the

wronged. Yet he could not help saying

as he caught and held her hand: "You have not doubted me, Cressy? You have not allowed this infamous raking up of things that are past and gone to

alter your feelings?" She looked at him abstractedly, "'You think it might alter anybody's feelings.

"Nobody's who really loved another

"'Don't let us talk of it any more," "Don't let us talk of it any more, she said, suddenly stretching out her arms, lifting them above her head with arms, lifting them above her head with we've got waitin'outside, an' escort you we've got waitin'outside, an' escort you fall clusped before her in her old, habit-ual fashion. "It makes my head ache; what with paw and maw and the rest of of them-I'm sick of it all."

She turned away as Ford drew back oldly and let her hand fall from his arm. She took a few steps forward, stopped ran back to him again, crushed his face and head in a close embrace, and then seemed to dip like a bird into the tall bracken and was gone.

The master stood for some moments bagrined and bewildered; it was characteristic of his temperament that he had paid less heed to what she told him than "Ye what he imagined had passed between her mother and herself. She was naturally jealous of the letters—he could forgive her that, she had doubtless been twitted about them, but he could easily explain them to her parents-as he would have done to her. But he was not such a fool to elope with her at such a moment, without first clearing his character—and knowing more of hers. And it was equally characteristic of him that in his ense of injury he confounded her with the writer of the letters-as sympathizing with his correspondent in her estimate of his character, and was quite carried away with the belief that he was equally wronged by both.

It was not until he reached the schoolouse that the evidences of last night's outrage for a time distracted his mind from his singular interview. He was struck with the workmanlike manner in which the locks had been restored, and the care that had evidently been taken to remove the more obvious and brutal traces of burglary. This somewhat staggored his theory that Seth Davis was the perpetrator; mechanical skill and thoughtfulness were not among the lout's characteristics. But he W115 still more disconcerted on pushing back his chair to find a small india-rubber tobacco pouch lying beneath it. The master instantly recognized it: he had seen it a hundred times before-it was Uncle Ben's. It was not there when he had closed the room yesterday after-noon. Either Uncle Ben had been there last night, or had anticipated him this morning. But in the latter case he would scarcely have overlooked his fallen. properly-that, in the darkness of the night, might have readily escaped detection. His brow darkened with a sudden conviction that it was Uncle Ben who was the real and only of-fender, and that his simplicity of the previous night was part of his deception. A siekening sense that he had been again duped but why or to what purpose he bardly dared to think-overcame him. Who among these strange people could be ever again trust? After the ashion of more elevated individuals, he had accepted the respect and kindness of these he believed his inferiors as a natcraf tribute to his own superiority; any change in their feetings must therefore be hypocrisy or disloyalty: it never occurred to him that he might have fallen below their standard. The arrival of the children and the re-

sumption of his duties for a time diverted him. But although the morning's exereise restored the master's self-confidence, it cannot be said to have improved his judgment. Disdaining to question Rupert Filgee, as the possible confident of Uncle Ben, he answered the curious inquiries of the children as to the broken doorlock with the remark that it was a fore the trustees of the board, and by the time that school was over and the pupils dismised he had quite resolved upon this formal disposition of it. In spite of Cressy's warning-rather because of it-in the new attitude he had taken towards her and her triends, he lingered in the school house until late. He had occupied himself in drawing up a statement of the facts, with an intimation that h is continuance in the school would depend upon a rigid investigation of the circumstances, when he was aroused by the ciatter of horses' hoofs. The next moment the school house was surrounded by a dozen men

He looked up; half of them dismounted and entered the room. The other half remained outside, darkening the windows with their motionless figures. Each man carried a gun before him on the saddle; each man wore a rude mask of black

cloth partly covering his face.
Although the master was instinctively aware that he was threatened by serious danger, he was far from being impressed by the arms and disguise of his mysterious intruders. On the contrary the obvious and glaring incon-sistency of this cheaply theatrical invasion of the peaceful school-house of this opposition of menacing figures to the scattered childish primers and text books that still lay on the desks around him, only extracted from him a half scornful smile as he cooly regarded them. The fearlessness of ignorance is often as unassailable as the most experienced valor, and the awe-inspiring invaders were at first embarrassed and then humanly angry. A lank figure to the right made a forward movement of impotent but was checked by the evident leg the party:

"Ef he likes to take it that way to ain't no regulators law agin't reckon," he said, in a voice which master instantly recognized as Jim Hin rison's, ''though ez a gin'ral thing they ing to the master he added, "Mist. Ford, of that's the name you go by everywhere, we're wantin'. Ford knew that he was in hopeless

eril. He knew that he was physically defenseless and at the mercy of twelve armed and lawless men. But he retained a preternatural clearness of perception, and audacity born of unqualified scorn for his autagonists, with a feminine sharpness of tengue. In a voice which astonishes even himself by its contemptuous distinctness, he said: "My name is Ford. but as I only suppose your name is Harrison perhaps you'll be fair enough to take that reg from your face and show it to me like a man. The man removed the mask-from his

face with a slight laugh. "Thank you," said Ford, "Now, perhaps you will tell me which one of you gentlemen broke into the schoolhouse, forced the lock of my desk and stole my papers. If he is here I wish to tell him he is not only a thief, but a cur and a coward, for the letters are a wo-

the right to know." If he had hoped to force a personal quarrel and trust his life to the chance of a single antagonist, he was disappointed, for although his unexpected attitude had produced some effect among the group.

men at the windows, Harrison strode de-

liberately towards him.
"That kin wait," he said; "jest now we propose to take you and your letters and drop 'em and you outer this yer township of Injin Springs. You kin take 'em back to the woman or critter you got 'em of. But we kalkilate you're a little too handy and free in them sorter things to teach school round yer, and we kinder allow we don't keer to have our gals and boys eddicated up to your high toned acrss the line. Ef you don't-we'll take vou anyway.

The master east a rapid glance around him. In his quickness of perception he had already noted that the led horse among the cavalende was fastened by a lariat to one of the riders so that escape by flight was impossible, and that he had not a single weapon to defend himself with or even provoke, in his desperation. the struggle that could forestall ignoming by death. Nothing was left him but his voice, clear and trenchant as he faced

"You are twelve to one," he said calmly, "but if there is a single man among you who dare step forward and accuse me of what you only together dare do, I will tell him he is a liar and a coward, and stand here ready to make it good against him. You come here as judge and jury condemning me without a trial and confronting me with no accusers: you come here as lawless avengers of your honor, and you dare not give me the privilege of as lawlessly defending my own."

There was another slight murmur among the men, but the leader moved impatiently forward. "We've had enough o' your preachin; we want you, '' he said roughly, ''Come.''
''Stop,'' said a dull voice.

It came from a mute figure which had mained motionless among the others Every eye was turned upon it as it rose and lazily pushed the cloth from its

"Hiram McKinstry!" said the others in mingled tones of astonishment and

"That's me!" said McKinstry coming forward with heavy deliberation. "I joined this yer delegation at the cross roads instead o' my brother who had the call. I recon et's all the same-or mebbe better. For I perpose to take this yer gentleman off your hands."

He lifted his slumbrous eyes for the first time to the master, and at the same time put himself between him and Harrison, "I perpose," he con-tinued, "to take him at his word, I perpose ter give him a chance to answer with a gun. And ez I reckon, by all ac-counts, there's no man yer ez hez a better right than me, I perpose to be the man to put that question to him in the same way. It may not suit some gents," he continued slowly facing an angry exclumation from the lank figure behind him, "ez would perfer to hev eleven men to take up their private quo'lls, but even then I reckon that the man who is the most injured hez the right to the first say and that man's me.

With a careful deliberation that had a double significance to the malcontents, he handed his own rifle to the master, and without looking at him continued. "I reckon, sir, you've seen that afore, but ef it ain't quite to your hand, any of those gents, I kalkilate, will be high-toned enuff to giv you the chyce o' theirs, And there's no need o' trapsin' beyon the township lines to fix this yer affair; I propose to do it in ten minutes in the brush yonder."

Whatever might have been the feelings and intentions of the men around him, the precedence of McKinstry's right to the duello was a principle too deeply rooted in their traditions to deny; if any resistance to it had been contemplated by some of them, the fact that the master was now armed, and that Mr. McKinstry would quickly do battle at his ide with a revolver in defense of his rights, checked any expression. Thesilently drew brek as the master and Mc-Kinstry slowly passed out of the schooly house together, and then followed in their rear. In that interval the master turned to McKinstry and said in a low voice-''I accept your challenge and thank you for it. You have never done me a greater kindness-whatever I have done to you-yet 1 want you to believe that neither now nor then-I meant you

any harm." "Ef you mean by that, sir, that ye reckon ye won't return my fire, ye're blind and wrong. For it will do you no good with them, '' he said with a signifi-cant wave of his crippied hand toward

the following crowd, "nor me neither."
Firmly resolved, however, that he would not fire at McKinstry, and clinging blindly to this which he believed was the last idea of his foolish life, he continued on without another word until they reached the open strip of chemisal that finnked the clearing.

(To be Continued Next Week.)



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